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The Martial Imagination: Cultural Aspects of American Warfare

Cecilia Gowdy-Wygant

Metropolitan State University of Denver/Front Range Community College

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The Martial Imagination, Cultural Aspects of American Warfare by Jimmy L. Bryan, Jr. Texas A&M University Press. 2013. Contents: Acknowledgements.. Introduction. Parts 1-4. Contributors. Index. Pg. 248. Paperback. \$29.95

Cultural historians expand our understanding of the grand narrative that dominates military history through various lenses of social influence. Jimmy L. Bryan, Jr. attempts this connection in a collection of essays that explore military history through violence, gender, memory, and religion. Twelve scholars from varied backgrounds analyze societal imaginations of military service and present a collection that examines varied moments in time from the Revolutionary War through the War on Terror that profoundly shaped personal, state, and national identities.

Important themes of this collection are explanations of violence and conquest as well as the roles gendered structures of the American military played in shaping both foreign affairs and national identity. John M. Kinder examines American zoos during the Cold War era as military – zoological complexes that shaped not only cultural imagination about foreign policy but also modern day zoo keeping practices. Kathleen Kennedy examines historian Francis Parkman's personal pain and suffering as qualifications for writing an accurate narrative about war and trauma. Jimmy L. Bryan, Jr. provides perhaps the most gripping evaluation of the collection. He examines the Texas Ranger in American lore as a complicated reflection of both explanations for and fears of violence in western expansionism and frontier exceptionalism. James J. Schaefer examines Revolutionary War soldier Charles Lee, seen by British authorities as distasteful and traitorous, despite allowing him certain privileges due to his status of importance and gentility.

Bonnie Miller argues American interpretations of the Mexican-American War of 1846 and the Spanish American War of 1898 relied on narratives that constructed ideologies and images of Latinos that supported military escalation. Texans often justified US intervention in Mexico by portraying Mexican men as inferior beings and a threat to women, much in the same way that

Americans portrayed Spaniards in Cuba nearly fifty years later. Belinda Linn Rincón's analysis of Evangelina Cisneros provides a multi-faceted observation of both Cisneros' daring and struggle in the patriotic quest for *Cuba Libre* as well as American publisher Hearst's thirst to portray her, and Cuba, in feminized roles that suggested their need to be rescued and cared for by the masculinity of the American military.

While twentieth-century media portrayed the US Army as multi-cultural and gender inclusive, the fear of a weakened and emasculated military prompted the rhetoric of strength and unity. Jeremy K. Saucier evaluates US Army advertising after the conflict in Vietnam, and illustrates these complexities of the emergence of multiculturalism in the armed forces in the wake of devastating blows to the imagined strength of the white male soldier after the war. Susan Eastman explores how films such as *We Were Soldiers* recast America's war in Vietnam as a "good war" and ultimately helped Americans forget the causes and ultimate consequences of the war in Vietnam. Jonna Eagle examines the melodrama as a lens through which to view the political imagination of America. From Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show to *Rambo: First Blood*, stories of heroic rescue, struggle, and suffering shaped the narrative of American militarization. Historical entertainment urges audiences to remember military conflicts as examples through which they can process feelings of victimization and threats of violence. However effective examinations of remembrances are, Jason Phillips encourages historians to examine imagined futures through letters and diaries of Civil War soldiers. Timothy J. Cathcart examines the imagination of air militarization as a Christian endeavor. Reaching the sky and delivering unprecedented destruction from the heavens, the Army Air Forces imagined their roles in the military tied to the strength of their religious mission, and pilots viewed the creation of a separate air force as an act of God's will.

In all, these twelve historians weave together a narrative of the American imagination of war that is new, fresh, and relevant to the grand narrative of military history. Though the key essay by Amy S. Greenberg skillfully weaves the importance of cultural analysis of the martial with an excellent evaluation of choices politicians made on the brink of war in 1898 to seemingly forget the Mexican American War of 1848, some essays in the collection meet the focus of this essay and some do not. While this may appear to some as a deterrent from the book's strength, this collection initiates a cultural introduction to military history and as such the subjects of and benefits of such analysis should not be bound by chronological or geographical borders. Overall it is an excellent book for cultural and military historians alike, as well as anyone interested in the lore of Texas history and identity.

Cecilia Gowdy-Wygant
Metropolitan State University of Denver
Front Range Community College